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ABSTRACT

The views of teachers and paraprofessionals regarding the role of paraprofessionals within an individualized remedial reading program in a New York inner-city school district were examined. Two rank order scales (Part 1 and 2) were utilized to determine the existence of these differences. Rank order correlations indicated that agreement of teachers and paraprofessionals about the "Qualities and/or Attributes" (Part 1) a paraprofessional should possess proved significant. Disagreement on the "Functions and Responsibilities" (Part 2) were noted. Through use of chi square analysis, the particular items contributing significantly to these differences were isolated, including sharing responsibility for classroom management and planning classroom activities. (Author)

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PARA-PROFESSIONALS: ROLE IDENTITY AND CONFLICT

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THE PROBLEM:

As one of a team of consultants the senior author was responsible for integrating an individualized remedial reading program into a New York inner-city school district. It became apparent that teachers and para-professionals had varying views on the role the latter were to play in this program. This confusion would occasionally lead to an open conflict. More frequently, however, it remained below the surface manifesting itself in such things as private complaints to the consultants from the teachers and para-professionals alike. A teacher might, for example, comment on a para-professional "taking over" the classroom while a para-professional might comment on not being given enough responsibility. It was recognized that clarifying and dealing with these feelings was a critical part of the process of integrating the individualized reading curriculum into each participating school.

Two rank order scales, the first of which focused on the "Functions and/or Responsibilities" (Part I) and the second which dealt with "Qualities and/or Attributes" (Part II) a para-professional should possess, were utilized in an attempt to clarify the specific issues on which para-professionals and teachers were divided.

It was hoped that having established the areas of disagreement between these two groups, feedback on this evaluation could be utilized as part of in-service training for para-professionals and teachers.

SAMPLE:

The group was drawn from teachers and para-professionals participating in a one-year federally funded individualized remedial reading program. This program was instituted in the one junior high school and elementary schools comprising a New York inner-city public school district. Teachers and para-professionals for the program were chosen at the discretion of individual school principals. Though the grant stipulated that teachers have training in reading, educational levels varied greatly. A number of teachers had a few non-matriculated courses in reading while others pursued doctorates in the subject. Most were veteran teachers and acknowledged that this assignment, with small classes, was highly desirable.

The para-professionals were also a heterogeneous group. Para-professionals' educational levels were even more diverse; some were finishing high school while others graduated college by the term's end. Few had special training in reading.

PROCEDURE:

In one session all subjects were administered the two rank order scales and directed to "Number the descriptive phrases in order of their importance to you," with one in front of a phrase signifying the most important item. Thirteen was the least important. Anonymity was requested. However, examiners did note whether scales were from teachers

or para-professionals as data were collected. Of the twenty-nine teachers sampled, three were eliminated due to inaccuracy in completing the scale. Among the nineteen para-professionals, eight could not be evaluated. Para-professionals having difficulties in understanding directions were noted by several examiners.

The sample was not random and included all those in attendance at the program's monthly in-service training meeting. The afternoon hour of the meeting prevented a number of para-professionals who attended college from participating. Each group had only one male participant.

ANALYSIS:

Data derived from the two instruments were treated in separate analyses. Following Guilford's method of normalizing rank order scales, mean ranks were converted to Z scores in order to allow for comparability. This procedure was selected for pragmatic purposes, as each group's normalized mean rank could then be plotted and utilized as visual aids in subsequent in-service training sessions for the teachers and para-professionals. Figures 1 and 2 clearly depict the relation between teacher and para-professional ratings for Part I and Part II analyses respectively.

Converting the data in Table 1 to ranks, and computing rank-order correlations yields coefficients of .364 (not significant) and .840 ($p < .05$) for Parts I and II respectively. In effect, there was an absence of a relation between what teachers and para-professionals perceived to be the functions and/or responsibilities of para-professionals while, concomitantly, there was strong agreement between the respondent groups on the qualities and/or attributes which para-professionals should possess. In view of the absence of a relation in the Part I analysis, further investigation of these data is indicated.

PartI: Table 2 shows the rank-order data for the Part I analysis, together with the rank-order differences between the teacher and para-professional ratings.

The data in Table 2 clearly demonstrate the areas of agreement and disagreement in the Part I analysis. From the table it can be seen, for instance, that there was no difference on item 5 (both groups perceived that the primary role of the para-professional was to assist teaching groups), while the greatest difference (nine ranks) was found on item 10 (sharing equal responsibility with the reading teacher).

A chi-square analysis of the frequency data for item ten revealed a significant difference ($X^2 = 37.33$, $p < .001$, $df = 12$) between the teachers' and para-professionals' ratings. On

the thirteen rank scale, teachers ranked item ten below 7 (relatively important) 38.5 percent of the time, while para-professionals ranked the same item below 7 72.7 percent of the time. In fact, the teachers' mean rank for item ten was 8.0, compared with a para-professional mean rank of 5.4.

CONCLUSIONS:

The results of the evaluation were significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, the data verified the subjective observations of the 5 consultants responsible for introducing this new individualized remedial reading program. This was particularly important as the consultants worked independently; each was responsible for two schools. Furthermore, individual schools within the district varied on may dimensions (i.e. junior high school vs. public school; large vs. limited bilingual program). These factors, therefore, made empirical validation of individual observations critical.

Once having validated that differences did, in fact, exist, the data were enlightening. On the face of it the two groups seemed to agree on many of the "details" ascribed to the role of para-professional. Yet, on the fundamental issue of "sharing equal responsiblity in the classroom" there is marked disagreement. The meaning of this difference remains to be clarified and substantiated. However, some

possible reasons are suggested. Historically, para-professional positions were developed as much for social goals within the community as for the pragmatic goal of relieving teachers from non-teaching tasks. In the 60's entering a job of para-professional often meant entering a career ladder, particularly among the socially disadvantaged. Currently, the lack of teaching positions means career advancement is limited. However, it may be that para-professionals in this group still consider themselves profession-bound. This seems suggested by the fact that many para-professionals in this reading program were taking two and four year degrees. (In fact, after the second year of the program, one para-professional had a teaching degree but no position to move on to.) Perhaps para-professionals' desire to "share equally" reflects the sentiment that they are developing or have the same competencies as teachers with whom they work. Frequently, members of the program quipped about this phenomena. "Oh, that para's better than the teacher" could be heard more than occasionally.

Another element may also be added to this picture. The individualized remedial reading program created a "decentralized" classroom. By design the traditional role of the teacher was altered. Children worked individually or in small groups. This required teachers to move around the room or position

themselves as a resource person in the class. In order to create an adequate individualized learning center, teachers had to develop managerial skills and techniques in planning the program on a day to day basis. Management and planning were largely the teacher's responsibility. However, within the classroom, para-professionals were often able to do the same work as teachers. (i.e. tutoring an individual child, testing, etc...) This classroom atmosphere may have reinforced the feelings of para-professionals that classroom activities were being shared equally between para-professionals and teachers.

At the same time, however, planning and classroom management were generally carried out by teachers. Perhaps, teachers considered this work "unshared" by para-professionals, thus leading them to have an opposing view of a para-professional's classroom responsiblities. In fact, teachers in the program often commented on the "extra" work involved in developing an individualized program. Many opposed the new demands placed upon them. Perhaps this resentment filtered into the relations between para-professionals and teachers. Teachers may not have communicated how much work (planning) they felt they did <u>not</u> share with the para-professionals. While para-professionals saw themselves as full and active participants in the classroom, the non-traditional classroom altered the roles of teachers and paras.

These suggestions, while not purporting to be conclusive, underscore the need for staff development.

It is clear that fundamental differences between teachers' and para-professionals' conceptions of the role of para-professional exist. Particularly in a program such as an individualized remedial reading program, where an alteration of traditional roles is demanded, attention must be paid to the ramifications of these demands upon all participants.

TABLE I

NORMALIZED Z SCORES

TEACHERS V. PARA-PROFESSIONALS

PART I and PART II

PART I

	ITEM	TEACHERS	PARA PROFESSIONALS
1.	Correcting papers	-.19	-.49
2.	Assist teaching one child	1.84	.98
3.	Construction/ preparation materials	.49	.24
4.	Discipline	-.49	.41
5.	Assist teaching group	1.99	2.03
6.	Parent contact	-.19	-.89
7.	Escorting children to and from class	.49	-.24
8.	Organizing room	.19	-.24

PART II

ITEM	TEACHERS	PARA PROFESSIONALS
1. Typing ability	-1.38	-3.43
2. High school diploma	.57	.48
3. Mother or father	-.41	.3
4. Bilingual	-.57	-1.4
5. Cultural background similar to children	-.09	.75
6. Enrolled in college	0	.48
7. Strict disciplinarian	-.163	-1.34
8. Accepting teacher's directions	.73	1.34
9. Autonomy	.41	-.45

TABLE I (Cont.)

9.	Articulation with classroom teacher	.10	.24	9. Autonomy	.41	-.45
10.	Sharing equal responsibility with reading teacher	.78	1.21	10. Permissive	-1.3	-2.24
11.	Administering tests	-1.17	-.41	11. Special training in reading	1.3	3.45
12.	Diagnostics	-1.94	-1.89	12. Warm	1.14	.3
13.	Record keeping	-.19	-1.22	13. Creative/ imaginative	1.22	1.34

TABLE 2

RANK ORDER COMPARISONS FOR PART I ANALYSIS

ITEM #	TEACHER RANK	PARA-PROFESSIONAL RANK	DIFFERENCE IN RANK
1	7.5	4	-1.5
2	2	3	-1
3	3.5	5.5	2
4	9.5	4	5.5
5	1	1	0
6	9.5	11	-1.5
7	3.5	11	-7.5
8	5	7	-2
9	6	5.5	.5
10	11	2	9
11	12	8	4
12	13	11	2
13	7.5	13	5.5

PARA-PROFESSIONALS

PART I

TEACHERS

PART I

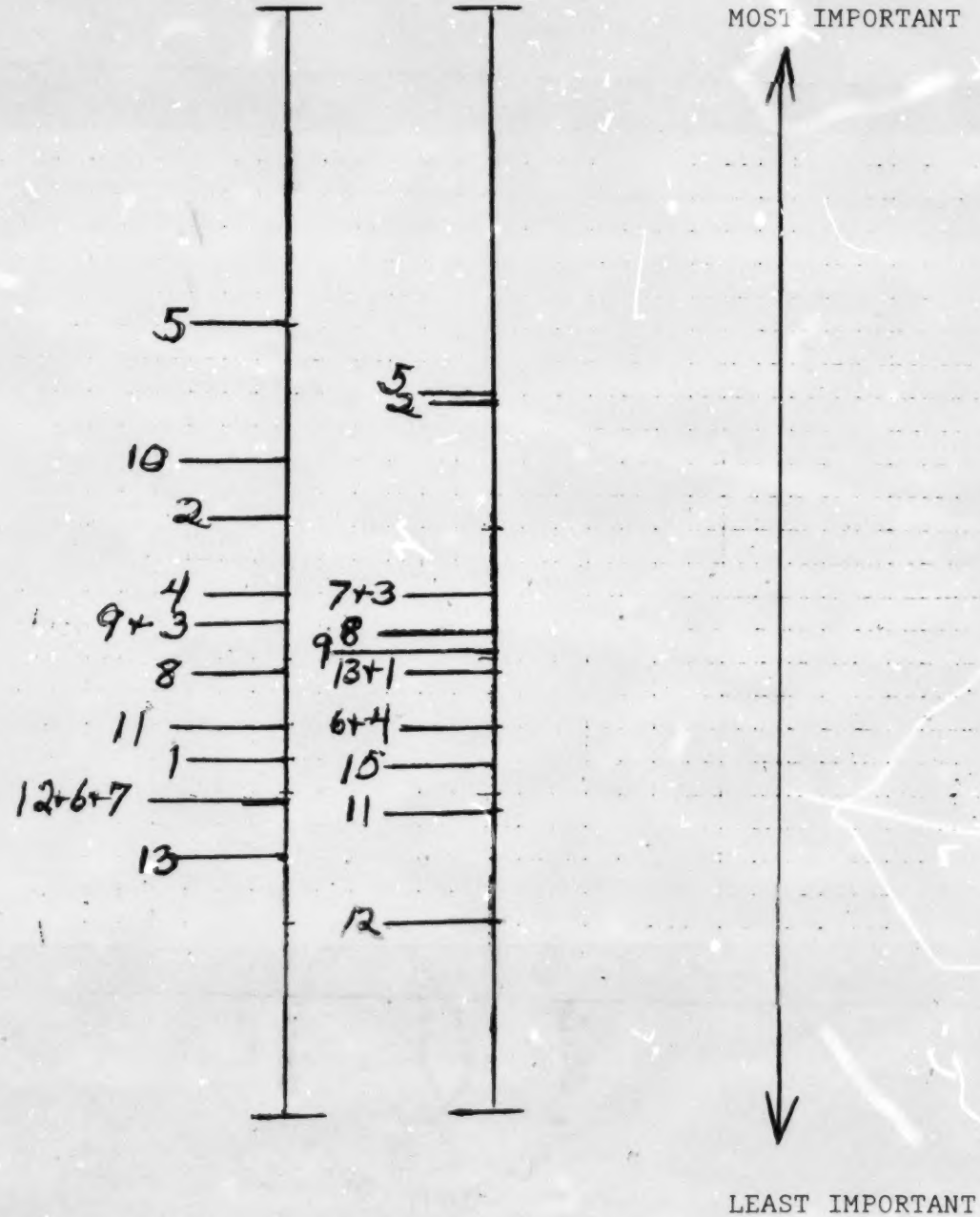

FIGURE 1

PARA-PROFESSIONALS

PART II

TEACHERS

PART II

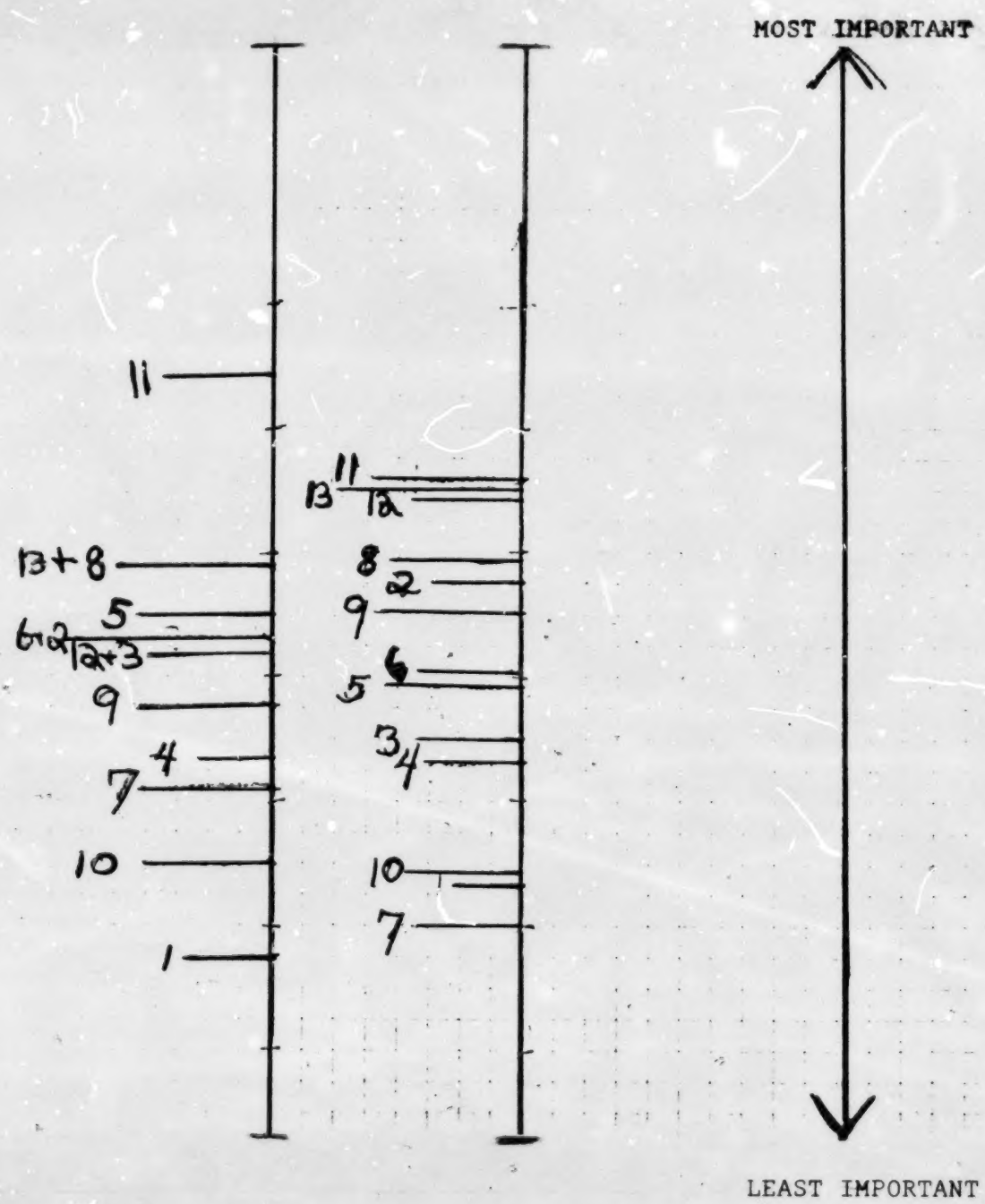

FIGURE 2